United Nations CCPR/C/SR.3504

International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights

Distr.: General
16 July 2018

Original: English

Human Rights Committee
123rd session

Summary record of the 3504th meeting
Held at the Palais Wilson, Geneva, on Wednesday, 11 July 2018, at 3 p.m.

Chair: Mr. Shany

Contents

Consideration of reports submitted by States parties under article 40 of the Covenant (*continued*)

Initial report of the Lao People's Democratic Republic

This record is subject to correction. Corrections should be set forth in a memorandum and also incorporated in a copy of the record. They should be sent within one week of the date of the present record to the Documents Management Section (DMS-DCM@un.org).

Any corrected records of the public meetings of the Committee at this session will be reissued for technical reasons after the end of the session.

GE.18-11623 (E) 160718 160718

1811623

Please recycle

The meeting was called to order at 3 p.m.

Consideration of reports submitted by States parties under article 40 of the Covenant (*continued*)

Initial periodic report of the Lao People's Democratic Republic (CCPR/C/LAO/1; CCPR/C/LAO/Q/1 and CCPR/C/LAO/Q/1/Add.1)

1. *At the invitation of the Chair, the delegation of the Lao People's Democratic Republic took places at the Committee table.*

2. **Mr. Sangsomsak** (Lao People's Democratic Republic), introducing his country's initial report (CCPR/C/LAO/1), said that the foundation of the Lao People's Democratic Republic in 1975 had opened a new era of genuine national independence after 500 years of foreign occupation. The Lao Government's nation-building over the previous four decades had focused on upholding the rule of law, good governance, democracy, human rights, fundamental freedoms and social justice, which in turn had led to sustained economic growth and improved living conditions. Thanks to a series of national development plans, the Lao People's Democratic Republic would shed its status as a least developed country by 2030, having already met two of the three eligibility criteria according to a recent review by the United Nations Committee for Development Policy.

3. The Lao People's Democratic Republic had become a party to seven of the core international human rights treaties. In order to enhance high-level coordination on its human rights obligations, the Government had established a National Steering Committee on Human Rights in 2012 to work alongside several inter-agency commissions specializing in the rights of children, women and persons with disabilities. Special importance was attached to protecting the rights and legitimate interests of specific groups in the country, including the many ethnic groups that comprised the Lao population. Acts intended to break down solidarity among ethnic groups were punishable as criminal offences. The rights of women, children and persons with disabilities were protected and promoted through the implementation of constitutional provisions and specific laws, decrees, national strategies and action programmes.

4. There had been major advances in the area of legislation. An amended constitution had been adopted by the National Assembly in 2015, providing for the establishment of provincial People's Assemblies; a number of laws had been passed facilitating the implementation of the Constitution and the provisions of the Covenant; and a draft Penal Code incorporating the country's international obligations was awaiting promulgation by the President. The Constitution protected the right to freedom of expression, assembly and association, and any violation of those freedoms was a criminal offence. Steps had also been taken to strengthen the rule of law and access to justice, notably through the implementation of the Legal Sector Master Plan. The Government continued to improve prison conditions, particularly by training prison officers in the application of international standards relative to prison management.

5. Much work had been done to raise awareness of the Covenant. Seminars, workshops and training courses on human rights had been organized for various target audiences, including government officials, members of the National Assembly, judges, law enforcement officers and civil society. The promotion and protection of human rights was an evolving process. Cultural and historical diversity and regional particularities suggested that there was no single human rights model. Unique cultures, local traditions and national institutions were positive factors that helped enhance the implementation of human rights under the Covenant. In that respect, the Lao delegation looked forward to guidance from the Committee on how the Covenant could be fully implemented in the national context of the Lao People's Democratic Republic.

6. **Ms. Kran**, noting that the State party's report had come several years late, said that she hoped reporting would be conducted in a timelier manner now that cooperation between the Committee and the Government had begun.

7. She was interested to know how often and in what cases international treaties had been found to prevail over inconsistent national legislation in the previous five years. In

that regard, she would appreciate clarification of the procedures in place to ensure that national legislation was compliant with the Covenant prior to its promulgation. She also wished to know how the judiciary had been trained in the application of the Covenant in domestic law and court decisions and whether training had led to changes in professional practice.

8. The delegation should provide information on why the State party's reservation to article 22 of the Covenant and its interpretative declarations concerning articles 1 and 18 were considered necessary. It would be interesting to know on what conditions those reservations might be withdrawn. In addition, she would be grateful for an explanation of the State party's statement that its national context and reality affected its implementation of the rights enshrined in the Covenant. It would also be useful to learn whether the State party planned to ratify the first Optional Protocol to the Covenant and, if so, in what circumstances. She wondered whether the State party would be open to receiving external support in that regard.

9. She wished to know what measures were in place to ensure the independence of the State party's human rights commissions and whether they addressed the full range of rights covered by the human rights treaties to which the Lao People's Democratic Republic was party. What conditions would be necessary for the State party to establish an independent human rights institution? She would be interested to learn what would be necessary to assist with a possible transition from the existing national commissions to an independent human rights institution and asked whether the State party had made any requests for external assistance in that regard.

10. Information on the steps taken towards ratifying the International Convention for the Protection of All Persons from Enforced Disappearance would be welcome. In the same vein, she would appreciate information on the State party's investigations into alleged enforced disappearances since 2008, including the number of open investigations and the results of all investigations, open or closed. In particular, she would welcome a full account of the investigation into the alleged enforced disappearance of Sombath Somphone, including information regarding the law enforcement officials assigned to the case, the way in which Mr. Somphone's family and the public were updated on the case's progress, and the overall strategy of the investigation. Confirmation of whether the closed-circuit television footage of Mr. Somphone's disappearance or the information provided by his wife had been analysed should be provided. She was interested to learn whether the State party had requested technical assistance from other countries in the matter and whether it had asked the public prosecutor to open an investigation into the case. In addition, it would be useful to know whether the authorities planned to issue a status report on the investigation to the appropriate court, in order to facilitate the issuance of a document confirming Mr. Somphone's disappearance.

11. She would also welcome updates on the alleged enforced disappearances of Kha Yang and other members of the Hmong ethnic group, as well as of Wuthipong Kachathamakul, Bouavanh Chanhmanivon and Keochay, Somphone Khantisouk, and the nine persons detained by security forces in 2009 for planning peaceful pro-democracy demonstrations. More generally, she wished to know whether the State party had considered establishing an independent expert commission to investigate cases of alleged enforced disappearance, ensuring that an independent expert body reviewed its investigations or inviting the United Nations Working Group on Enforced or Involuntary Disappearances to visit the country. She would also welcome information on the availability of effective remedies for complainants, on any efforts made to return the remains of disappeared persons who had been found dead to their families, and on any measures in place to provide the family members of disappeared persons with assistance, particularly in legal matters.

12. **Ms. Waterval** said that the prohibited grounds for discrimination in the State party's legislation differed from one law to another and were not fully consistent with article 26 of the Covenant. The Constitution failed to mention race as a ground for discrimination, and discrimination on grounds of colour, sex, political or other opinion, property and birth was not covered by other legislation. There was also no explicit prohibition of discrimination on grounds of sexual orientation and gender identity. The delegation should specify a time

frame for enacting comprehensive anti-discrimination legislation and provide information about the status of the bill on gender equality. Referring to the Labour Law, she would appreciate confirmation that there was no wage gap between men and women. She asked how many people had been arrested, prosecuted and convicted during the previous five years pursuant to article 177 of the Penal Law, which criminalized discrimination against women. Information regarding discrimination against older people, persons with disabilities, minorities and indigenous people would also be welcome.

13. She asked how many people had been arrested, prosecuted and convicted pursuant to articles 94 to 96 of the Penal Law concerning hate speech. The delegation should explain the reference to "re-education without deprivation of liberty" in article 95 and state whether re-education was also combined with deprivation of liberty. She asked how many corporate entities or organizations had lost their permit or had been required to terminate their activities pursuant to article 68 (5) of the Law on Media. How did the State party interpret the phrase "with the intention of undermining national solidary" in article 66 of the Penal Law?

14. She asked which articles of the Penal Law imposing the death penalty had been eliminated. Had the mandatory imposition of the death penalty been abolished? Given that there had been a practical moratorium on the death penalty for about thirty years, she asked why the State party had not rendered the moratorium official. According to the State party's replies to the list of issues, death sentences had been imposed on about 315 persons for the most serious crimes. Noting that the term "most serious crimes" in article 6 (2) of the Covenant should be interpreted restrictively, she wished to know how many persons had been sentenced for drug-related offences, how many sentences had been commuted to life imprisonment and how many sentenced persons had been pardoned. When had the death penalty last been imposed and for what offence? The maintenance of persons on death row without informing them of the possible outcome constituted a violation of article 7 of the Covenant. The Committee urged the State party to render the moratorium on the death penalty official, to abolish the death penalty and to ratify the Second Optional Protocol to the Covenant.

15. **Mr. Santos Pais** said that, according to the report submitted by the State party to the Working Group on the Universal Periodic Review in 2015 (A/HRC/WG.6/21/LAO/1), policies on gender equality and promotion of the advancement of women had not been sufficiently carried out in society. Many women were still under the influence of their families and traditional stereotypes, which limited their access to justice and their potential for self-development. The report also stated that the number of female government officials in decision-making positions was not sufficiently high. He asked what steps the State party intended to take to ensure gender equality and non-discrimination in both public life and the private sphere, to raise awareness of women's rights, to combat family and traditional stereotypes, and to ensure greater empowerment of women, particularly in rural, remote or mountainous areas.

16. He asked whether it was possible, under the Law on National Defence, to comply with the conditions for declaring a public emergency laid down in article 4 of the Covenant and related obligations, including the explicit prohibition of derogation from the non-derogable human rights and fundamental freedoms enshrined in the articles listed in article 4 (2). He asked whether the State party considered that it had a comprehensive counter-terrorism legal framework, including a definition of terrorism and terrorist activities, and legal safeguards for persons suspected of or charged with a terrorist or related crime. Did it consider that the broad definition of terrorism in the Law on Money Laundering and Combating the Financing of Terrorism was in line with international standards and the Covenant? Were the provisions of the Law on Criminal Procedure concerning protection of the rights of suspects or persons charged with terrorist or related offences the same as those applicable to other offences?

17. He would appreciate information about the action that the State party intended to take to encourage the reporting of cases of domestic violence and to raise the awareness of women and children of their rights and avenues for seeking assistance and protection. Were there plans to provide further training for law enforcement officials, judges and prosecutors on legal provisions and the detection and proper handling of such cases? The delegation

should also indicate what measures would be taken to ensure prompt and effective investigation of cases of violence against women and children, appropriate punishment of perpetrators and adequate remedies for victims. It would be helpful to have statistics for the previous three years on complaints, investigations, prosecutions, convictions, sentences imposed and compensation for victims.

18. He asked whether the State party planned to step up efforts to implement the 2016 Anti-Human Trafficking Law by investigating, prosecuting and convicting traffickers, including complicit officials, as well as child sex tourists. What additional measures would be taken to disseminate information and to train police and border officials on formal victim identification and referral procedures, with a focus on vulnerable groups? The delegation should describe the measures that would be taken to assist victims, including male victims, in reintegrating into their home communities. Furthermore, what measures would be taken against sexual exploitation of children from ethnic minorities, particularly the Mon-Khmer and Tibeto-Burman communities, migrant and refugee children, children living in institutions, transgender boys, children working in exploitative conditions, children from rural areas and children living in poverty?

19. Referring to allegations that immigration officials had enabled the illicit transportation of thousands of undocumented migrant workers from China and Viet Nam into the State party for the purpose of employment in large-scale infrastructure, mining and agricultural projects, where some might have been subjected to trafficking, he asked what measures the State party had taken to address the problem.

20. Despite the legal and institutional framework concerning the prohibition of torture, former foreign inmates had consistently referred to punishment in State party prisons that amounted to torture and ill-treatment, including the practice of locking their legs in wooden stocks for extended periods, severe beating of inmates and burning of their genitals and other body parts with cigarettes. He asked when the State party intended to incorporate into its legislation a definition of torture that reflected article 1 of the Convention against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment, and whether it intended to ratify the Optional Protocol to that Convention. The delegation should provide statistics for the previous five years on the number of reported cases, prosecutions and convictions of law enforcement and security officers for physical violence and torture of detainees, on the penalties imposed and on the reparations provided to victims. What measures did the State party intend to take to strengthen the supervision of detention facilities and to ensure that prompt and impartial investigations were undertaken of all alleged cases of torture and ill-treatment?

21. Although independent oversight of prisons and detention centres was protected by the Constitution, all levels of the judiciary seemed to experience frequent executive interference. Judges were appointed by the National Assembly, and most judges and public prosecutors allegedly belonged to the ruling party. He asked whether the State party planned to allow an independent mechanism to oversee prisons and detention centres. He would appreciate information regarding re-education measures for detainees and the locations in which they were conducted, and asked whether re-education camps were still operating.

22. **Ms. Brands Kehris** said that paragraph 36 of the State party's replies to the list of issues failed to define unlawful abortions. She asked whether voluntary terminations of pregnancy were lawful in cases where the woman's life or her physical or mental health was at risk, in cases of rape, incest or non-viable pregnancies, or in any other cases, and would appreciate information about the procedures for such terminations. The delegation should provide statistics on the number of arrests, prosecutions and convictions for unlawful abortions during the previous five years and the penalties imposed. Did the State party plan to take steps to decriminalize abortion?

23. According to a study undertaken in March 2015, 20 to 50 per cent of female admissions to hospital for gynaecological treatment were due to unsafe abortions. The Minister for Health had acknowledged in 2016 that unsafe abortions contributed to maternal mortality and morbidity. The delegation should provide updated estimates of clandestine abortions and the share of maternal mortality due to such abortions. Were any

measures being taken to address the problem foreseen in the National Strategy and Action Plan for Integrated Services for Reproductive, Maternal, Newborn and Child Health 2016-2025, and had the Prevention of Unsafe Abortion Guidelines led to any improvements? She asked how such measures were monitored and whether measures had been taken to ensure access to safe abortions throughout the territory.

24. Referring to reports of a birth rate of 94 per 1,000 girls aged 15–19 years, she would appreciate updated statistics and asked whether the rate had decreased in recent years. Access to sexual and reproductive health services was reportedly limited for that age group. The delegation should describe the impact of sexual and reproductive health education and provide updated information on such programmes, including in rural areas.

25. While maternal mortality rates had decreased in 2015, they were nevertheless high compared with other countries in the region. Updated figures for 2016 and 2017 should be provided. She would also appreciate information on the impact of the measures taken to provide prenatal and postnatal care, including free-of-charge care at public health-care centres and hospitals, and other measures aimed at reducing maternal mortality rates, especially in rural and remote areas.

26. **Mr. Ben Achour** said that the State party's reply to question No. 14 of the list of issues focused on pretrial detention, whereas the information requested related to police custody or detention pending appearance before a judge. According to paragraph 2 of the Committee's general comment No. 8, article 9 (3) of the Covenant required that any person arrested or detained in a criminal case must be brought promptly before a judge or other officer authorized by law to exercise judicial power. More precise time limits were fixed by law in most States parties and, in the Committee's view, delays must not exceed a few days. He therefore reiterated the Committee's question regarding the maximum period of custody before an arrested person was brought before a judge or other competent officer. The Committee wished to know whether there had been cases in which persons had remained in custody for months or even years without being brought before a judge. What legal framework could be invoked in order to differentiate between police custody and pretrial detention?

27. He asked whether the legal provisions governing requests for release addressed to the Office of the People's Prosecutor were consistent with article 9 (4) of the Covenant.

The meeting was suspended at 4.25 p.m. and resumed at 4.45 p.m.

28. **Mr. Sangsomsak** (Lao People's Democratic Republic), assuring Committee members that their frank comments on the state of affairs in Laos were welcome, said that it would be much easier to give effect to the recommendations made by the Committee if they were accompanied by financial support. Laos was a small, underdeveloped country, as a visit to Vientiane would make clear. It was not that the Lao authorities lacked the will to fully implement the Covenant; current conditions and circumstances prevented them from doing so.

29. **Mr. Sisoulath** (Lao People's Democratic Republic) said that the Lao People's Democratic Republic had recently adopted a new law on treaties and international agreements, replacing a presidential ordinance from 2009. Although the underlying principle remained unchanged — the country still had a dualist system, meaning that international agreements had the force of law only after having been explicitly incorporated into the domestic legal framework — a number of changes had been made. For example, some international agreements, or parts thereof, were directly applicable when so decided by the ratifying authority (the National Assembly or the Government). When existing legislation was incompatible with the provisions of an international instrument that the country was planning to ratify, it was the responsibility of the relevant authority to propose an amendment to that legislation or a new law to bring domestic law into line with international law. There were nonetheless still some points of incompatibility.

30. The country's courts could not invoke international legal instruments directly, but in adjudicating cases they took its international obligations into account. Efforts to inform members of the judiciary of the country's international obligations had been made possible in part by the International Law Project, a project administered by the Ministry of Foreign

Affairs and funded by the United Nations Development Programme, the European Union and other donors. Activities carried out as part of the Project had included a large number of courses, workshops and lectures for officials from public agencies, including law enforcement agencies, and members of the National Assembly and the judiciary. The Project had concluded in 2013, but training efforts were ongoing.

31. In the event of a conflict between article 22 of the Covenant, to which the country had made a reservation, and Decree No. 115 on Associations of 2009, the Covenant would prevail. In the event of a conflict between that article and the Constitution, however, the Constitution would prevail. Interpretative declarations concerning article 1 of the Covenant had been made by many States parties, including the Lao People's Democratic Republic. The Lao authorities had made their declaration to stress their view that the article should be interpreted to mean that the people of the country as a whole, not each of its 49 officially recognized ethnic groups, had the right of self-determination. The country's territorial integrity should not be affected by the right of self-determination recognized in article 1. The declaration concerning article 18 stated that the article should not be construed as authorizing or encouraging any activities by which anyone could be coerced or compelled into professing or not professing a religious belief or converting from one religion to another. That declaration had been made to legitimize some limits on the exercise of freedom of religion, a freedom that had been abused in the past.

32. The authorities were making every effort to strengthen the country's current human rights mechanisms, such as the National Committee on Anti-Human Trafficking and the National Commission for Persons with Disabilities and Elderly Persons, before establishing a national human rights institution. However, the National Steering Committee on Human Rights covered a wide range of human rights and, although it was not fully autonomous, it operated in accordance with some of the principles relating to the status of national institutions for the promotion and protection of human rights (the Paris Principles). Its members included representatives of public agencies, the judiciary and the National Assembly. The experiences of other countries with their national human rights institutions had been studied, and members of the institutions of other countries, such as Australia, India and Indonesia, had been invited to discuss their experiences with the Lao authorities.

33. Under the Optional Protocol to the Covenant, individuals were expected to exhaust all available domestic remedies before submitting a communication to the Committee. The Lao People's Democratic Republic, however, did not have a comprehensive system of domestic remedies. For that reason, it was not yet prepared to ratify the Optional Protocol.

34. The Government had not ratified the International Convention for the Protection of All Persons from Enforced Disappearance in part because it was a complex instrument. In some ways, it could be seen as two instruments in one, as it covered matters, such as communications and visits, often covered by separate instruments. It could not be ratified until Lao officials had gained greater familiarity with it. Enforced disappearance had not been defined as a crime in its own right in domestic legislation but, as the country was not yet a party to the Convention, it had no legal obligation to ensure that enforced disappearance constituted an offence under its criminal law.

35. Considerable efforts, which had begun immediately after news of his disappearance had been received, had been made to elucidate the case of Sombath Somphone. International organizations had been contacted, for example, and notifications had been sent to police headquarters around the country. Resolving such cases was often difficult, but the Government was of the view that the Lao investigating authorities were capable of locating Mr. Somphone without international assistance.

36. **Mr. Sangsomsak** (Lao People's Democratic Republic), adding to the information that had already been provided, said that the Government was considering reviewing its reservation to article 22 and its declarations concerning articles 1 and 18. The National Steering Committee on Human Rights was chaired by a cabinet minister. Having such a high-level official in that position was a sign of the importance the Government attached to human rights.

37. Sombath Somphone, whom he had frequented in Washington, D.C., had once been a close friend of his. He had encouraged Mr. Somphone to return to Laos after completing his

studies. In Vientiane, after leaving his government post, Mr. Somphone had founded a non-governmental organization. Although Mr. Somphone had ultimately distanced himself from him, he had nonetheless been involved in ensuring that the authorities continued to pursue the case. Mr. Somphone had never been declared deceased or missing because of uncertainty about who should inherit his assets, which amounted to over half a million US dollars in cash and several properties. The woman who claimed to be his wife had failed to provide a marriage certificate, and his sister had been unable to submit convincing evidence that she was the rightful inheritor of his estate. The case therefore remained pending before the courts.

38. **Ms. Ernthavanh** (Lao People's Democratic Republic) said that, according to statistics for 2015, just under one fifth of ministers and one eighth of deputy ministers were women. Of the 437 directors-general in the various ministries, 16.2 per cent were women. The percentage of women governors at the provincial and district levels was low, at only 5 and 6 per cent respectively. Nevertheless, participation in the civil service across all levels was approaching gender parity. In the law enforcement system, women comprised 38 per cent of the 641 officers, and their participation rate was 27 per cent at district level and 39 per cent at provincial level. Moreover, 33.7 per cent of the employees of the Office of the Prosecutor were women.

39. **Ms. Phanit** (Lao People's Democratic Republic) said that all citizens were considered equal under articles 35 and 37 of the Constitution. The Government attached great importance to promoting and protecting the human rights of all individuals, including those with different sexual orientations. A drafting committee was currently working on a new law on gender equality, which would soon be submitted to stakeholders and the public for their comments. It was hoped that the draft law would be put to the National Assembly by the end of 2018.

40. As outlined in paragraph 24 of the State party's report, the Labour Law and the Law on the Development and Protection of Women provided women with the right to remuneration and benefits on an equal basis with men. Moreover, maternity leave had been increased from three to five months, and up to six months for mothers who had undergone a caesarean section.

41. The National Commission on the Advancement of Women and the Lao Women's Union worked hand in hand to disseminate information about women's rights. Various awareness-raising initiatives had been implemented, including a campaign that encouraged men and boys to speak out about violence against women in social and family settings.

42. The Lao Women's Union had a counselling centre in the capital city and a network of counselling service providers in all provinces. The Union ran programmes to support victims of domestic violence and ease their reintegration into society.

43. Article 13 of the Decree on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities stated that children with disabilities had the right to express their views freely on all matters affecting them and that their views would be given due weight in accordance with their age and maturity.

44. In line with the prevailing cultural tradition in the country, elderly people lived with and were cared for by younger members of their family, such as their children. No other form of home care was provided for elderly citizens.

45. Abortion was legal when the continuation of the pregnancy would endanger the life of the mother. However, unlawful abortions also took place. The State ran programmes to educate girls and women on the issue.

46. **Mr. Norasing** (Lao People's Democratic Republic), referring to questions asked by Ms. Waterval, said that national laws approached the concept of non-discrimination from different angles depending on their scope and substance. However, the basic principle of non-discrimination was enshrined in the Constitution. Whether there was a need for a comprehensive law on non-discrimination in Laos had been debated for some time but, as no definitive conclusion had been reached, he could not provide a timeline for the enactment of such a law.

47. As the Ministry of Labour had issued regulations in 2017 that supplemented the country's labour equality laws, he was not aware of any pay gap between men and women in the Lao People's Democratic Republic.

48. In the criminal justice system, the public prosecutor was authorized to issue arrest warrants for persons suspected of engaging in illegal activity. In emergency cases, law enforcement officers could arrest a suspect and place him in custody directly, but they must report the arrest to the public prosecutor and obtain an arrest warrant as soon as possible. They must also inform the suspect's family or next of kin. In such cases, the police had 24 hours to decide whether to open an investigation and apply to the public prosecutor for permission to do so.

49. **Mr. Khammoungkhoun** (Lao People's Democratic Republic), referring to questions asked by Mr. Santos Pais, said that, although a specific counter-terrorism law had not been adopted, acts of terrorism were currently covered by article 7 of the Law on Anti-Money Laundering and Counter-Financing of Terrorism. Human trafficking was a complex crime that often involved multiple actors and cross-border activities. The Government had made considerable efforts to counter human trafficking by adopting a number of policies and legislative measures, including the 2016 Anti-Human Trafficking Law and the second National Action Plan on Human Trafficking 2017–2020, which consisted of 5 programmes, 23 projects and 138 activities. Nevertheless, budget and human resource constraints posed challenges for the implementation of the plan. In February 2018, the National Steering Committee on Human Trafficking had released its annual report for 2017, in which it had highlighted the activities it was undertaking in collaboration with China, Viet Nam, Cambodia and Thailand, and outlined its cooperation with multilateral corporations, international organizations and United Nations specialized agencies.

50. **Mr. Sangsomsak** (Lao People's Democratic Republic) asked whether it would be possible to receive in writing the questions that had not yet been answered by the delegation.

51. **The Chair** said that Committee members could submit written queries through the secretariat if necessary. The delegation would have time to present its replies at the next meeting.

52. **Ms. Kran**, reiterating an earlier question, said that the delegation should provide an update on the status of several cases of alleged enforced disappearance, involving: the members of the Hmong community forcibly repatriated from Thailand in 2011; Kha Yang, the Lao ethnic Hmong arrested after his forced return from Thailand; the Hmong men who had been detained or subject to enforced disappearances after surrendering themselves to the authorities; the exiled Thai activist abducted by armed men in 2017; the student leaders arrested in October 1999 for organizing a peaceful pro-democracy protest; the two women and seven men detained by security forces in 2009; and the critic of Chinese-sponsored agricultural projects who had reportedly disappeared after being abducted by armed men in uniform. In addition, she asked whether the Government would consider opening up the National Steering Committee on Human Rights to members of civil society. She wondered if the administrative reasons for not ratifying the Optional Protocol to the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights might be reconsidered in the light of the benefits that ratification would bring to the people of the Lao People's Democratic Republic. Lastly, as the delegation had encouragingly indicated that the Government might reconsider its reservation to article 22 of the Convention, she would welcome further information in that regard.

53. **Ms. Waterval** said that she had not heard replies to her questions about hate speech, discrimination against minorities and indigenous peoples, and the abolition of the mandatory death penalty. She would welcome details on cases in which the death penalty had been applied.

54. **Mr. Santos Pais** said that he had heard no mention of the prohibition of torture. At the following day's meeting, he would be keen to discuss the related issue of conditions in penitentiary institutions.

The meeting rose at 6 p.m.